DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 400 772 HE 029 621

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TITLE In Their Own Words: BSU Graduates Tell of Best and Hardest and Recommend Changes. Research Report 96-03.
INSTITUTION Boise State Univ., Idaho.
PUB DATE Apr 96
NOTE 32p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Alumni; Attitude Measures; Attitudes; *Data Collection; *Followup Studies; *Graduates; *Graduate Surveys; Higher Education; *Institutional Evaluation; Questionnaires; *Research Methodology; Research Reports; Student Development; Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Boise State University ID; Idaho

ABSTRACT

This paper contains the results of a survey of graduates of Boise State University (Idaho) from 1992-93 and 1993-94. The report presents respondents' (N=1,476) answers to three open-ended questions of the survey concerning "what they liked most" about their BSU experience, "the hardest thing they had to do" in order to complete their education at BSU, and suggestions for improvement. The paper also reports the common themes that emerged. Almost half of the respondents cited people, usually faculty, as the aspect of their BSU experience that they liked most. After people, graduates mentioned that they enjoyed the learning process. The "hardest thing they had to do" most commonly involved academic issues; administrative issues such as class scheduling; personal issues such as balancing school, work, and family; or coping with financial difficulties. Respondents' advice concerning improving education at BSU fell into the general categories of: curriculum review and update; instruction; climate, including more support, understanding, respect, and communication; administration; and advisement. Included are tables showing numbers of comments in specified areas and what percentage of the total they represent. An appendix includes a description of the survey methodology and a copy of the survey form. (MAH)

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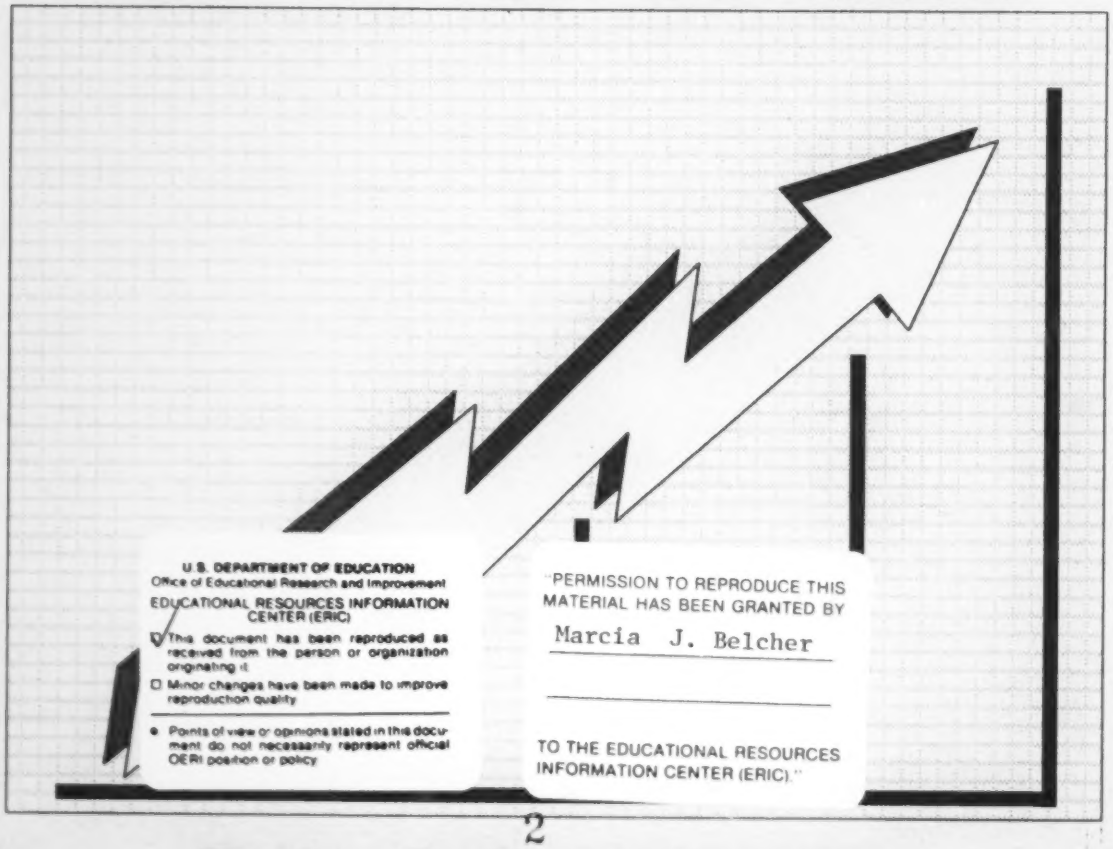
IN THEIR OWN WORDS:
BSU Graduates Tell of Best and Hardest and Recommend Changes

Research Report 96-03

Institutional Assessment



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BSU Graduates Tell of Best and Hardest and Recommend Changes

Research Report 96-03

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Boise State University
April 1996

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:
BSU Graduates Tell of Best and Hardest and Recommend Changes

ABSTRACT

This study uses 1992-93 and 1993-94 graduates' own words as they responded to three open-ended questions at the end of a survey and reports the common themes that emerged. One question was "What did you like most about your BSU experience?" Another was "What was the hardest thing you had to do in order to complete your education at BSU?" Finally, "What advice would you give to your department to improve the quality of education offered?" To analyze the 200+ pages of comments, coding schemes were developed based on the common themes in the responses.

What Graduates Liked Most About their BSU Experience

Responses were grouped into three large categories: People (47% of responses), Learning (27% of responses), and a cluster of smaller categories which were grouped under "Other" (26% of responses). Under the category of "People," Graduates were most likely to point to faculty as the best part of their BSU experience (26% of all comments made). Others mentioned their peers, either because they were "comrades in arms" going through the same experience, or because the diversity of the student body (in terms of age, experiences, and beliefs) had broadened their perspective. Under "Learning," graduates usually wrote in general terms, saying things like "I grew as a whole person". Others, though, wrote of a specific part of the curriculum that they valued. The "Other" category included responses such as the feeling of accomplishment for getting a degree and the benefits and beauty of BSU and Boise.

The Hardest Things that Graduates had to do to Complete Their Education

Most responses related to academic issues (33% of responses), administrative issues (21% of responses), or personal issues (42% of responses). Under "Personal Issues," graduates were most likely to mention how difficult it was to manage their schooling and work and family within the time constraints they had. Others mentioned the financial difficulties of going to school. Other smaller categories included staying motivated, finding good child care, dealing with health crises,

commuting, learning to learn, and finding the courage to go back to school after long absences. Academic issues mainly included comments about completing courses or other activities that were required for graduation. Administrative issues included such things as scheduling classes and transferring credits.

Advice to Improve the Quality of Education

Many of the themes that emerged in the other questions were also seen here. Comments were assigned to five categories: Curriculum (41% of responses), Instruction (20% of responses), Climate (14% of responses), Administration (10% of responses), and Advisement (9% of responses). About 6% indicated that they had no advice to improve education--that departments should "keep up the good work."

Curriculum advice included themes such as needing stronger links to jobs and the "real world" (the most frequently mentioned response), updating or modifying the curriculum (including checking courses for redundancy and consistency), adding more courses and degrees, and updating equipment and software used in classrooms. Instructional advice included urging faculty to stay passionate and excited about their subject, hiring more faculty (especially adjuncts who bring "real world" experience), and changing the way instruction is delivered (e.g., more interactive).

Administrative advice included such things as scheduling courses. Advising advice had the recurring theme of graduates wanting more help with jobs and careers. The Climate category included responses that were generally directed at how the department operated--how students were treated and how faculty treated each other. A recurring theme was that students wanted more support and respect for being adult learners.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

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Numbers can be compelling. They can tell how much or how little, what the trends are, where significant differences lie. But they lack a depth and a warmth that can only be found in words. Words paint a picture, describe a terrain, put flesh on the black and white numbers that march across the page. Numbers might be able to tell you that you have a problem, but only words will tell you what to do about it.

Prior reports have given you the numbers. The reports contained information such as: 55% were satisfied with course registration processes; 72% thought they had made the right decision in choosing BSU; 24% said they had to delay graduation because courses they needed were not available; 82% reported frequently or occasionally using the skills they acquired at BSU on the job; 80% thought BSU had either a major or moderate impact on their writing ability.

This study uses graduates' own words as they responded to three open-ended questions at the end of a survey and reports the common themes that emerged. One question was "What did you like most about your BSU experience?" Another was "What was the hardest thing you had to do in order to complete your education at BSU?" Finally, "What advice would you give to your department to improve the quality of education offered?" (See Appendix A for details of the survey process and a copy of the full survey.)

A majority of graduates (62%) chose to respond to the questions at the end of the survey. These comments were printed off to begin the analysis, resulting in almost 200 pages of text. To begin, about one-third of the comments were read for common themes and structure. After this coding scheme was developed, all the comments were read again and coded based on content. One response might be coded into multiple categories if it contained more than one content area; thus there are more responses than there were respondents.

What emerged was a different structure for each question. When talking about what they liked most about their BSU experience, most graduates either mentioned people met at BSU (staff or students) or the process of learning itself. These two major categories were followed by a number of other smaller categories, such as a feeling of accomplishment for getting a degree. When responding to what was hardest to do, responses fell into three major categories: personal issues (e.g., time management), academic issues (e.g., completing difficult courses), and administrative issues (e.g., scheduling classes and registering). Content analysis of the responses to the question of advice they would give their departments to improve the quality of education offered resulted in five categories: curriculum, instruction, advisement, climate, and administration.

What did you like most about your BSU experience?

The three major areas developed for responses to this question were the **people** met at BSU, the **learning** graduates experienced, and eight **other** categories of lesser importance. The relative importance of each category along with the specific themes that were included under each can be seen by viewing Table 1 and Figure 1.

The People

More than anything else, graduates mentioned the people they met while they were taking courses. In fact, almost half (47%) of the responses mentioned either BSU faculty and staff, other students, or interactions with others in general (see Table 1).

It was obvious from the comments that we have some fine faculty at BSU that have made lasting impressions on students, as this was the area most frequently commented upon (26% of all comments made). As one graduate noted, "Teachers are well-qualified, well-prepared, enthusiastic, helpful, sometimes I think I'd like to grow up to be one of 'em!" Another responded that what s/he liked most about the experience was "genuinely interested and 'real' faculty. Most were always there when I needed them and they are interestingly unique!" Another indicated that

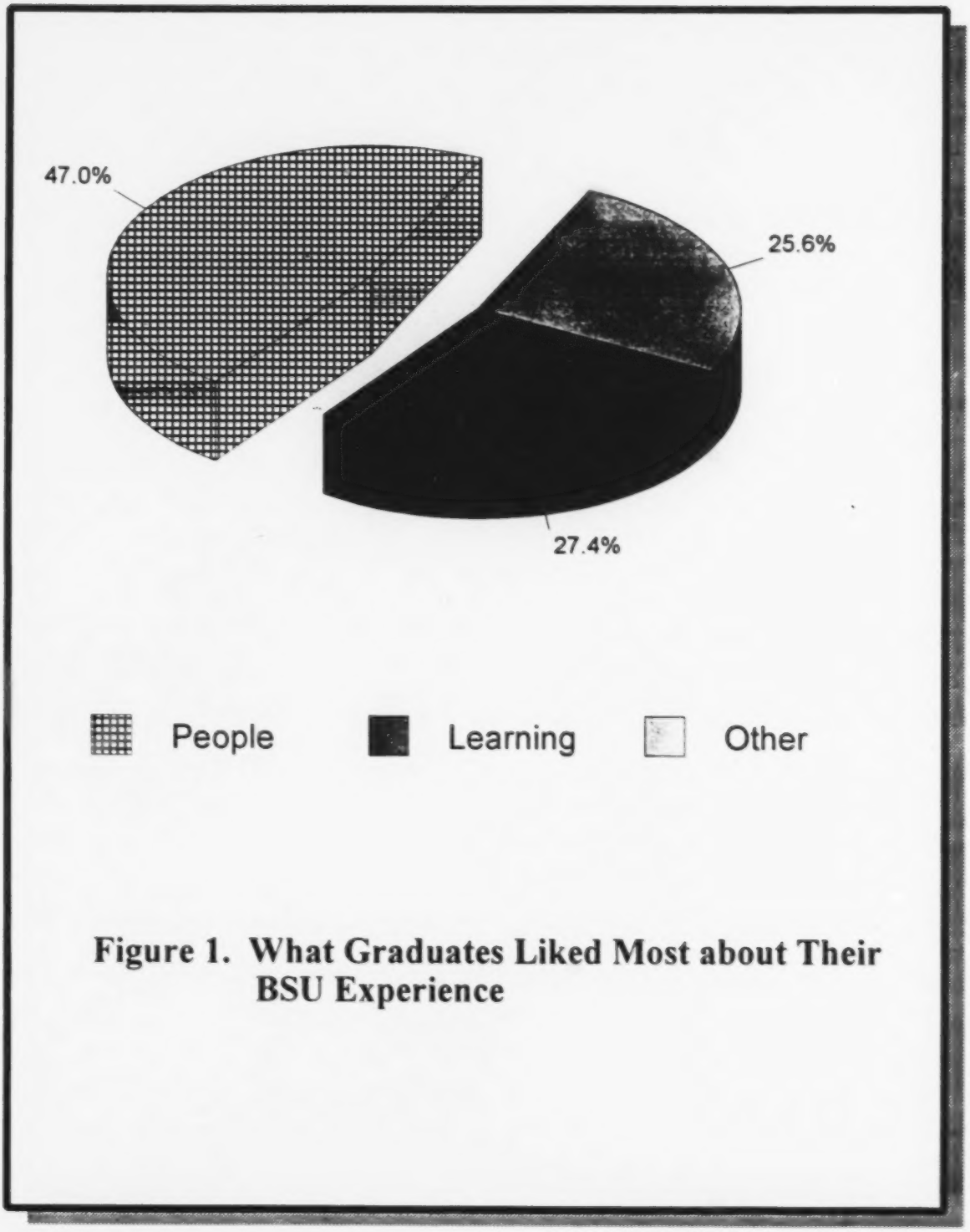

Figure 1. What Graduates Liked Most about Their BSU Experience

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Table 1
Categories of Student Responses to the Question
"What did you like most about your BSU experience?"

	Number of Comments	% of Total
People		
Faculty/Staff	385	26.28%
Other Students	239	16.31%
Unspecified	64	4.37%
	688	**46.96%**
Learning		
General	186	12.70%
Curriculum	127	8.67%
Activities	89	6.08%
	402	**27.44%**
Other		
Accomplishment	118	8.05%
Setting	95	6.48%
Student Activities	65	4.44%
General	43	2.94%
Course scheduling	25	1.71%
Support Services	12	0.82%
Low Cost	11	0.75%
Easy to Do	6	0.41%
	375	**25.60%**
Total	**1465**	**100.00%**

they liked "a few of the professors [who] really took the time to get to know their students. Some actually learned our names and still remember them."

Not all graduates limited their responses to full-time faculty. As one graduate noted, "Some of the best teachers were not full-time staff and they were exceptional." Another, when asked what they liked most about the BSU experience, simply responded "interaction with adjunct faculty." Several also mentioned advising staff as the best part of their experience.

Graduates also mentioned their peers. There were several reasons peers were mentioned, but a major one was that graduates enjoyed the differences they found among people at BSU. When asked what s/he liked most about the experience, one graduate responded, "The diversity of individuals (students). The students made the four years of my college career more exciting." A number of others specifically mentioned the "wide age range of students" and "the interaction with young and old students."

Others mentioned the similarities to their peers as the thing that made their interactions so enjoyable. As one graduate noted, "Peers were going through the same problems, peers were outstanding." Another indicated that "sharing common goals with students that had my same interests" was the best part of the BSU experience.

A final group of "people" comments didn't distinguish between faculty and students. This group included comments such as "Meeting people who loved and were dedicated to their field of study. Some people had an enthusiasm that was contagious." Another graduate wrote, "I enjoyed being with people who held different beliefs than me. It helped me reaffirm my own set of values and to understand why I believe what I do." Both of these points were echoed by another graduate who thought the best part of his/her experience was "the level of acceptance to new and creative ideas and points of view from different individuals."

The Learning

Some students chose to emphasize the learning as the best part of their experience at BSU; 27% of the comments touched on this theme. The greatest percentage of comments (13%) were general in nature, relating to the totality of the learning experience. As one graduate wrote, "I enjoyed the learning experience. The exchange of ideas is interesting and challenging." Another added, "I learned a great deal about people and their different ideas and views on life. I also learned to be far more independent than ever before." A third said simply "I grew as a whole person."

Other graduates mentioned a specific part of the curriculum as the best part of their BSU experience. One graduate wrote that "the fact that I was in a major that I really enjoyed" was the best part. Another said, "I feel that the strangest 'plus' of my major was the extensive writing required; while being a general pain in the neck, this writing requirement has enhanced my ability to communicate by written form." Others mentioned their senior seminar experience, or "the broad diversity of training that the nursing program offers," or "the Master's Core Program in the summer, which brought real school reform to university classrooms."

Fewer mentioned course activities as the best part. Responses that mentioned theater productions, clinical experience, internships, and group/team interactions fell under this category.

Other "Bests"

The remaining responses were grouped under the general category of "Other." The largest percentage of responses (8% of the total) related to the sense of accomplishment from getting a degree. As one graduate wrote, the best part was "the opportunity to complete the college education I should have accomplished fifty years ago. The feeling of making a long sought goal." This was echoed by another graduate who said the best part was "that somehow I found the courage to quit my job and go to school to better myself. It wasn't always easy with a family." Another responded simply, "I finished!"

Other students thought the best part was the setting they were in. For some, this was the "smaller classes so I could actually ask a question and have the teacher talk to me." For others, it was "the beautiful campus and the friendly atmosphere." Some graduates waxed poetic, mentioning "sitting on a bench while reading a book and listening to those beautiful chimes marking the hours" or recalling the "smell of the cottonwoods along the Boise River." Still others noted that "Boise itself is such a great place to live and enjoy the outdoors." One graduate noted that the best part was "the opportunities available to students that the city has to offer due to the school's proximity. Capitalize on this. It's your competitive advantage."

There were no other single categories that accounted for more than 5% of the total responses. The remaining small categories that graduates thought were the best part of their BSU experience were the activities they participated in outside of class, the support services they received such as the library and child care, the moderate cost of education, course scheduling that was convenient, the ease in completing the degree, and general comments such as "the experience of being at a university."

What was the hardest thing you had to do in order to complete your education at BSU?

Almost all responses could be related to **academic** issues (in the classroom), **administrative** issues (outside class but within the university), or **personal** issues (related to the graduate's private life), though a few were too general to fit even into these broad categories. The structure that was developed to analyze the responses to this question can be found in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Personal Issues

By far, the hardest things that graduates thought they had to do were not academic or administrative in nature. They were the personal issues that had to be attended to in order to keep going to school, and they accounted for 42% of the responses that graduates made to this question. Reading the responses made it clear just how very nontraditional the BSU student body is and how much sacrifice may be necessary to attain an education.

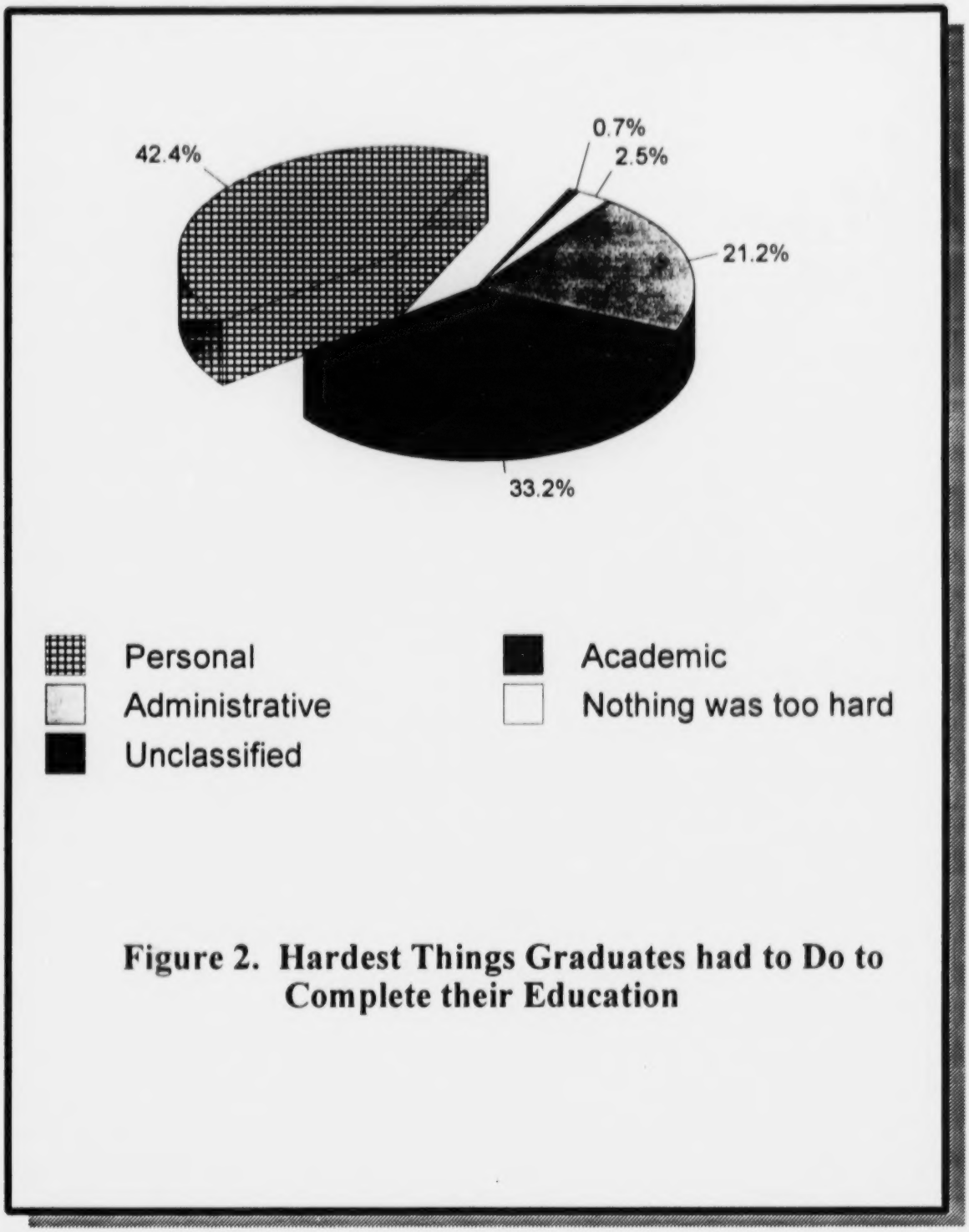

Figure 2. Hardest Things Graduates had to Do to Complete their Education

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Table 2
Categories of Student Responses to the Question
"What was the hardest thing you had to do in order to complete your education at BSU?"

	# of Comments	% of Total
Personal		
Time constraints	275	20.40%
Finances	95	7.05%
Motivation	54	4.01%
Commuting	38	2.82%
Personal General Comments	27	2.00%
Study skills/testing skills/library skills	22	1.63%
Go back/start	17	1.26%
Health	12	0.89%
Choosing a major	12	0.89%
Child/parent care	10	0.74%
Move to Boise	9	0.67%
	571	**42.36%**
Academic		
Complete graduate requirements/courses/tests	265	19.66%
Deal with Departments/Faculty	87	6.45%
Complete course requirements/activities	67	4.97%
Meet with advisors/faculty	25	1.85%
Academic General Comments	3	0.22%
	447	**33.16%**
Administrative		
Scheduling of classes	93	6.90%
Parking	45	3.34%
Registering for classes	42	3.12%
Transfer	36	2.67%
Administrative General Comments	27	2.00%
Financial aid	25	1.85%
Graduation paperwork	18	1.34%
	286	**21.22%**
Nothing was too hard	**34**	**2.52%**
Unclassified	**10**	**0.74%**
Total	**1348**	**100.00%**

One in five (20%) of the graduates mentioned how hard it was to manage their time and work within the time constraints they had. As one graduate noted, "it was very hard to work and go to school at a campus that doesn't always accommodate non-traditional students as well as they might." Another graduate mentioned it was hard to "teach full time and complete a full time course (no 'slack' given--I would not have wanted it, however)." Some graduates commented on the difficulty of balancing demands of school and basic living needs. One said, "Sometimes I had to compromise my study time by having to work a lot--this affected my grades at times, but I had to pay rent!"

About 7% of the responses related directly to the financial difficulties of schooling. One graduate thought the hardest thing was to "survive financially on minimum wage, part-time work with two teenage kids." Another was worried about the future financial burden, commenting that the hardest thing was to "take out student loans. I'm in debt for the next 10 years of my life." One graduate summed it up for many when s/he said that the hardest thing was to "pay for it--had to work two jobs to go to school full time at one point. Better financial aid to ordinary people would be a good thing."

There were no other categories that more than 5% of the responses pertained to. Comments included things like staying motivated, finding good child care, dealing with personal and family health crises, commuting for many miles or uprooting from home and perhaps family to be in Boise, learning to learn, and finding the courage to go back to school after a long absence from formal education.

Academic Issues

About one-third of the comments dealt with the academic issues that students face as they strive to complete their education (see Table 2). Most (20%) had to do with completing courses or other activities that were required for graduation. Some students thought the hardest thing was to get through math classes. Others thought the core, which one graduate named "the hardest, but very rewarding, the problem was too much crammed into too little time." Many education

graduates thought that student teaching or taking the NTE (National Teacher Examination) was the hardest thing they had to do. For some the problem was generally having to take course(s) they did not like, rather than those with a particular content such as math.

Some students found the hardest thing was to deal with particular departments or faculty; about 6% of responses fell into this category. For some graduates, it was an individual that was difficult to deal with. As one graduate wrote, it was hard to "tolerate one particularly incompetent faculty member." For others, it was the department as a whole. Certain departments seemed to be in conflict which some students picked up on. One graduate wrote that it was hard to "deal with some professors sabotaging others, some professors socializing with students and forming factions." A few found it was hard to deal with the values espoused in some classrooms. One graduate wrote that it was hard to "keep my conservative political views to myself in a liberal department."

Another category which included about 5% of the responses was for academic requirements in particular classes. For some, it was "going public." One graduate wrote about how hard it was to "defend my point of view on a topic." Another graduate wrote that it was hard to "get up in front of class and give speeches in vertebrate natural history. However, I was able to do a good job and now I have more confidence in that." Some found team work to be very hard. One graduate wrote that "coordinating group projects, especially with group members with low motivation and inflexible schedules" was the hardest thing s/he had to do. A few mentioned honors projects or master's theses. One graduate, in explaining how hard it was to complete his/her honors project, wrote, "It was basically an internship requiring my best work and a huge paper on it. Because real people in the community were depending on me, I had to put forth my very best effort instead of just enough to get the grade I wanted."

There were no other categories that more than 5% of the graduates mentioned. About 2% mentioned difficulties in finding advisors, getting good advice, and meeting with thesis

committees. The remaining comments were very general, like "study hard to get accepted into med school."

Administrative Issues

Most of the comments that remained could be considered administrative--that is, they were not related to the classroom nor were they related to graduates' lives outside the University. These were comments that dealt with getting classes, parking, transferring credits, etc. They accounted for slightly more than 20% of the comments made and were the smallest category of the three.

The largest category of responses (7% of all made) related to the scheduling of classes. Comments in this category again made it clear that many, if not most, graduates were non-traditional students who commuted to campus and held a job. As one vocal transfer student noted, the hardest part was...

> *planning my schedule. I never knew what was going to be offered or during what semester. At the U of I, I could plan my whole 4-year undergraduate program with their time schedule. Change this! I commuted 120 miles and it would have helped if I could have planned my coursework in advance. I also worked full time.*

A related issue to scheduling classes is then registering for them. Though only about 3% of the comments were related to registration, when combined with scheduling the total reached 10%.

The only other administrative issue related to registration was the problem of transfer; this issue was mentioned in about 3% of the responses. One transfer problem seemed to be losing credits. The other was finding out what was still needed for graduation. As one graduate indicated, "As a transfer student the biggest difficulty I faced was determining courses I needed to complete for graduation. Counseling/assistance in this area is very poor as nobody seems to understand the registrar's evaluation of transferred credits."

Parking, a perennial problem, was mentioned as the hardest thing in only 3% of the responses. Evidently, when graduates took a long view, other things became more important than parking. Nevertheless, those that mentioned it were adamant. As one graduate admonished, "Find parking! Your parking and the cost are enough to make one choose another school if such a choice were available!"

The remaining administrative categories were mentioned by only 1% or 2%. They were difficulties in dealing with the financial aid office and problems in getting graduation evaluations completed .

What advice would you give to your department to improve the quality of education offered?

Many of the themes that emerged in the other two questions were also seen here. Comments were assigned to five categories: **Curriculum** (41% of responses), **Instruction** (20% of responses), **Climate** (15% of responses), **Administration** (10% of responses), and **Advisement** (9% of responses). In addition, about 5% of the respondents indicated that they had **no advice**, as indicated by comments such as "Keep up the good work." There were overlaps between the areas and sometimes it was hard to know exactly where to assign a response. For example, a comment that faculty need to bring more of the real world into the classroom could be classified as curriculum advice or instructional advice. Generally, comments such as these were assigned under "curriculum" since they referred to course content; comments about the process of teaching were included under instruction (see Table 3 and Figure 3 for details).

Curriculum Advice

The largest category of responses concerned the curriculum. Within that area, the most frequently occurring theme (mentioned by 14% of respondents) was that classroom instruction needed stronger links to jobs and the "real world". As one respondent wrote, "Try to make the coursework into a life learning experience--in other words, more true to life. Keep actual

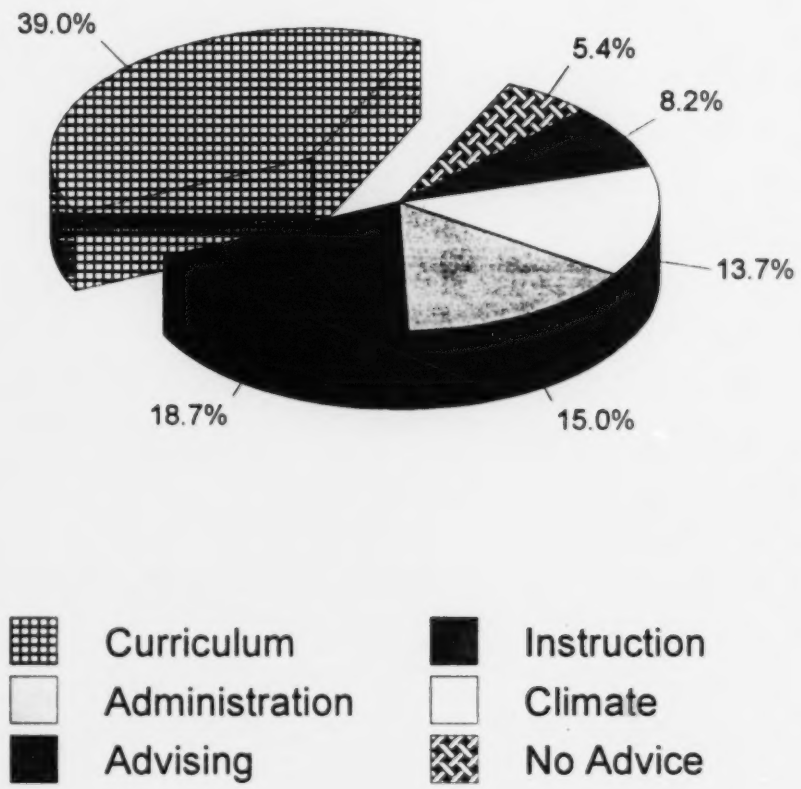

Figure 3. Advice To Improve Education

Table 3
What advice would you give to improve the quality of education at BSU?

	# of Comments	% of Total
Curriculum		
Link to jobs, real world	162	13.83%
More courses, degree, subjects	105	8.97%
Update content/change content	80	6.83%
Use up-to-date equipment, software	44	3.76%
Develop internships	40	3.42%
Make harder/more challenging	27	2.31%
Lighten workload/extend program	13	1.11%
Other	11	0.94%
	482	**41.16%**
Instruction		
Need better instruction (process)	90	7.69%
More instructors	52	4.44%
Change how instruction delivered/format	44	3.76%
Grading on exams	21	1.79%
Focus on instruction/students not politics, etc.	15	1.28%
Other	10	0.85%
	232	**19.81%**
Climate		
Better Communication with students/more interaction	54	4.61%
More caring/support/respect toward students	83	7.09%
Less department conflicts/more professional/more comm	27	2.31%
Other	6	0.51%
	170	**14.52%**
Administration		
Other	40	3.42%
Scheduling	51	4.36%
Class Size	13	1.11%
Resources	15	1.28%
	119	**10.16%**
Advising		
Career options	54	4.61%
Other	47	4.01%
	101	**8.63%**
No Advice	**67**	**5.72%**
Total	**1171**	**100.00%**

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experiences. More field experiences." Another with a similar thought wrote, "The job field is not like a textbook. Sharing experiences and providing real life examples are a more effective teaching skill." It was sometimes difficult to separate the curriculum from the instruction, and some graduates thought changes should begin with faculty. One graduate commented that the University "needs professors who spend time in real public school classrooms instead of relying on texts." Another noted that "Teachers need to relate more to the real business world to apply what they are teaching. At times, they were outdated."

Another category of comments (about 7% of the total) was that the curricular content generally should be updated or changed. For example, some graduates recommended that the curriculum be studied for redundancy. One respondent wrote "Improve the beginning courses for the _____ degree. These classes are boring, repetitive, and definitely not challenging." Others suggested that the curriculum be revised to "make more sections of the core classes similar. The class taught by one professor should be similar in content and requirements as another section by a different professor." Others were concerned with the progression of courses. One graduate noted that "higher level classes were extremely difficult because of lack of preparation in earlier classes."

Most of the advice to update equipment and software related to learning to use computers and software on the job. One graduate advised: "Offer a class that covers regular computer usage. Employers need people who have computer skills." Another added, "Concentrate more on technology used in writing fields, and to the business environment in which writers would use their skill."

The other large group of curricular responses (about 9% of the total) came from graduates who wanted more -- more electives, more courses in the major, more degrees. Many had advice that was similar to the graduate who wrote that the department needed a "broader range of courses to pick from (electives) when obtaining credits to complete for a degree." Some were more explicit,

such as the graduate who wanted "more courses in leadership roles." A few others wanted advanced degrees available in their subject.

The remaining responses were given by less than 4% of respondents (see Table 3). They included advice to develop more internships, make the program more challenging (or less challenging in a few cases), and other responses that could not be further categorized.

Instruction Advice

About 20% of the comments were related to instruction. The largest category was related to improving the instructional process. One graduate addressed faculty directly, advising "Always be excited about the work you are doing. It gives the student a reason to continue." Another graduate wrote similarly "Show passion for what you do! Be positive and keep current and fresh in your areas of expertise." Others wrote more generally. One said, "I would suggest hiring quality, ethical professors who will behave professionally with students and not abuse students." Another warned, "Beware of teachers who have given up the art of teaching but still retain their positions. They are not teaching, just wasting our time and trying our patience."

Others advised that more instructors should be brought into the department. Generally, most suggested bringing in adjuncts. One graduate typified responses by writing "Bring in more 'adjunct' faculty -- 'real world' experience is invaluable." Others were less specific. One graduate suggested "more instructors for students, for more one-on-one." Another requested "more courses offered so you don't have to wait several semesters to take the class you need. Which means hiring more faculty. Basically, the _____ Department needs more money!"

About 4% of the respondents had suggestions that related to the way instruction was delivered. These suggestions covered a variety of possibilities. One graduate wrote, "My best classes were very interactive. I think I learned the most in these classes as well." Another had a similar response, suggesting that instruction "needs to move from a textbook based curriculum to a project/experimental based curriculum. Most of my classes taught me how to memorize,

regurgitate, and take exams." Another advised "less group work. It's more important to make some kids/young adults do their work properly rather than leaving it up to other group members." Another wanted instructors to "give more examples and have more photocopies of notes or diagrams available to all students. Also, use good easy-to-explain books and materials."

There were no other categories that had at least 3% of the responses. About 2% had suggestions related to grading exams fairly and keeping politics out of the classroom. The remaining responses were not further classified.

Climate Advice

The category included responses that were generally directed at how the department operated--how students were treated and how faculty treated each other. The largest theme (mentioned by 7% of the respondents) dealt with showing students more caring, support, and respect. As one graduate wrote, "advise them to remember that students are people too--with feelings, knowledge and yes, even some areas of expertise." Another wrote, "Be more encouraging and positive. I found a lot of teachers trying to turn us off to education because so many want to be teachers." Many comments were related to the non-traditional student. One advised "Most of my classmates were non-traditional, older students. The curriculum and instructors treatment of students still needs work to reflect that." Another said simply, "Be more user friendly to working students."

A second category, mentioned in about 5% of the responses, dealt with communication and interaction. Most of the responses dealt with faculty/student interaction, such as suggestions to "have more faculty/student interaction outside of class" and have "one-on-one meetings with professors to discuss any issues. A few wanted more interaction with their peers, such as the graduate who wrote "Provide for more interaction between students within the department. I didn't know anyone in my department graduating class; have the interaction times in the evening!"

The remaining category was related to inter-departmental strife; responses were found for only a few departments and covered 2% of the responses. As one graduate wrote, "Teachers should teach rather than fight!" The few remaining comments were not classified.

Advising Advice

Advising was a small category covering only 9% of responses Within the category the main recurring theme was that graduates wanted more help with jobs and careers. One graduate's response typified many when s/he said, "Spend more time explaining to students the career options after graduating. This information should be given in the first semester of study." Another noted "There were hardly any days for students to learn of continuing their education or job placement."

The small number of advising responses remaining, about 4% of the total, covered a variety of issues. One wrote, "Stay in touch with all students to make sure they are tracking properly to meet their goals." Another thought BSU should "offer better academic advising to the students who are within a year of graduating. This would make planning for the last semester's courses easier." A third advised "better communication and correct information given to students. Faculty were not good advisors." Similarly, another wrote "advisors need to show more genuine interest, not just give out signatures."

Administrative Advice

All advice related to administrative procedures and processes was placed in this category; about 10% of responses could be found here. The theme which had the largest number of comments was about scheduling courses. Graduates wanted courses to be offered more frequently. One graduate wrote "offer classes (upper division) each semester rather than only every other year." Another echoed this response saying the department should have "more courses offered so you don't have to wait several semesters to take the class you need." More courses were recommended in the evenings, on Saturday, and during the summer.

The remaining responses covered smaller class size, more resources (classrooms, labs, budget), and a variety of other administrative advice that was simply placed under "Other."

Summary and Conclusions

This study has sought to report in graduates' own words what they thought of their BSU experience. What did they think was best about their experience? What was hardest? What advice would they give to departments to improve the quality of education? To find out these things, graduates from 1992-93 and 1993-94 were surveyed. Their open-ended responses were read and categorized into areas and themes.

More than anything else, when asked what they liked most about their BSU experience, graduates mentioned the people they had met. In fact, almost half of the responses mentioned people. The people mentioned most frequently (26% of the cases) were faculty. After people, graduates mentioned that they really enjoyed the learning process. Smaller percentages liked the feeling of accomplishment of earning a degree or the setting of BSU (both the university and the community).

The hardest thing that most students had to do was deal with all the personal issues that appeared as part of or in spite of going to college (42% of the responses). Fully 20% of the responses mentioned the difficulty of balancing home, school, and work, and finding the time for all. About a third thought the academic requirements were most difficult, while slightly over 20% mentioned administrative issues such as BSU's schedule of classes and finding courses that were at available times.

The most frequently given advice for improving the quality of education was to review and update the curriculum (mentioned by 40%), in particular to link what happened in the classroom more closely to the world of work. About 20% focused on instruction, urging BSU to improve the instructional process. Students mentioned a desire for more support, understanding, respect, and

communication in about 15% of the responses. Administrative issues and advisement were the remaining areas.

This study confirms that people are the major strength of BSU. Faculty in particular made dramatic differences in students' lives, usually in positive ways but occasionally in a negative fashion. They teach and counsel, support and advise. They can have impacts in ways they may not even be aware of.

Students are also a strength. Many graduates commented on how the diversity of the student body brought special opportunities for learning and for growth. This diversity comes with a price, however. Non-traditional students in particular voiced a need for more support and understanding as they tried to bring balance to a life with too many commitments and too little time. They asked that other ways of scheduling classes be considered. They asked that their status as adults be recognized.

What would graduates like to change the most? A constant thread across several areas was the need to link the university closer with the world of work. Graduates asked for it when they said they wanted more adjuncts (who come from the outside) They asked for linkage again through more internships, through changing teaching to be more project-oriented and interactive, and through advising on careers. They wanted the curriculum modified so it was more work-oriented and computers and software constantly updated to be consistent with what was being used in the workplace. Prior studies have shown that a majority of graduates are working full-time or working and going to school. They want to know they can earn a living and use some of the skills they acquired at BSU.

This report helps to put a face on the numbers reported in prior reports. In combination, the two present a picture of graduates mostly pleased with their education but also willing to say that there are some areas where change would be beneficial. It also shows just how determined, resourceful, and non-traditional our graduates are.

Appendix A

Survey Methodology

The follow-up of graduates is a process implemented this year to provide information to departments, colleges, and university administrators on the success of BSU graduates and their perceptions of their BSU experience. The process will take place every other year and will include all graduates from the prior two years. This year, graduates from 1992-93 and 1993-94 were surveyed.

The process began in April 1995 with a review of several surveys that were already available (including the BSU survey administered in 1992). These were presented at the Deans' Council in May along with the request to notify the Coordinator of any particular data needs. A draft survey was then developed and distributed to Deans and Associate Deans for review. By mid-June, a finalized survey was ready for printing and mailing.

The survey was mailed the last of June along with a cover letter from BSU President, Charles Ruch, using addresses from an alumni file maintained by the Office of University Relations. In early August, a follow-up letter from the Coordinator of Institutional Assessment was sent. This was followed with a reminder postcard several weeks later. As shown below, based on the number of correct addresses, the response rate was 43%.

Number of Surveys Mailed:	*3,358*
Number returned due to Incorrect Information:	*7*
Number of Surveys Returned:	*1,456*
Percentage of Delivered Surveys Returned:	***43%***

The response rate differed depending on the College and program from which students received their degree. Only 29% of students in Applied Technology programs responded. The response rate for the other colleges ranged from 42% to 49%. See Table 13 for details.

This pattern of return indicates that some colleges and programs are over-represented in the general results. No attempt was made, however, to weight the responses, and findings are reported in simple percentages of the total number of responses.

SURVEY OF BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

INTRODUCTION: As part of a continuing self-study effort, Boise State University is engaged in a survey of its graduates to secure information that can be used to help improve the educational programs and related services we provide our students and the communities they represent. Since you are a graduate of BSU, you are in a pivotal position to help us in this important assessment. We would, therefore, appreciate your taking 10-15 minutes of your time to complete this questionnaire.

Your responses to this survey will be kept COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL and all reports using the information provided will only deal with groups of respondents, not individuals. Therefore, we are asking you to respond with candor so we will be able to use the information/ideas you provide to improve our academic and support programs. However, if you do not want to answer a particular item, feel free to omit that item and go on to the next one.

After you have completed your questionnaire, place it in the prepaid envelope, and return it to the address shown. Please return this instrument within the next week. However, if this arrived while you were away, we'd still like to hear from you. THANK YOU.

1. Which one of the following best describes what you are currently doing?

①	Continuing my education, not employed outside the home
②	Employed and continuing my education
③	Employed full-time (not continuing my education)
④	Employed part-time (not continuing my education)
⑤	Self-employed (farm or business owner, etc.)
⑥	Serving in the Armed Forces/Military
⑦	Caring for a home/family (not employed outside the home, not continuing education)
⑧	Unemployed and seeking employment
⑨	Other (Please specify)_____

2. Have you taken any licensing or certification examinations related to your major or area of study at BSU?

①	Yes, I have taken and passed such an exam
②	Yes, I have taken such an exam but do not yet know the results
③	Yes, I have taken such an exam but did not pass
④	No, I have not taken any such exams but plan to do so
⑤	No, and I have no plans to take any such exams
⑥	Not applicable

3. Did you receive any special certification or training in an endorsement area at BSU?

①	No
②	Yes

4. If yes, in what area?_____

5. Since graduating from BSU, have you taken additional course work?

①	No
②	Yes

6. How well did BSU prepare you to continue your education?

①	Exceptionally well
②	More than adequately
③	Adequately
④	Less than adequately
⑤	Very poorly
⑥	Not applicable

7. Since graduating, have you applied for admission to another degree program?

①	Yes
②	No, but plan to apply
③	No, and have no plans to apply

8. What is the highest degree you plan to obtain?

①	I do not plan to obtain any additional degrees
②	Bachelor's degree
③	Master's degree
④	Doctoral Degree
⑤	Professional degree

9. Are you currently working on another degree?

①	Yes
②	No

BELOW IS A LIST OF ABILITIES OR SKILLS ONE MIGHT EXPECT TO DEVELOP WHILE PURSUING A POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION. TO THE ***LEFT***, INDICATE YOUR OPINION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SKILL IN AN INDIVIDUAL'S EFFORTS TO BE PERSONALLY/PROFESSIONALLY SUCCESSFUL IN TODAY'S WORLD. TO THE ***RIGHT***, INDICATE THE IMPACT OF YOUR EXPERIENCE AT THIS UNIVERSITY ON YOUR ATTAINMENT OF EACH SKILL.

Importance to You					Impact of University Experiences				
Major Importance	Moderate Importance	Minor Importance	No Importance			Major Impact	Moderate Impact	Minor Impact	No Impact
④	③	②	①	10. Developing original ideas and/or products		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	11. Thinking objectively about beliefs, attitudes, and values		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	12. Making and exercising a lifelong commitment to learning		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	13. Living my personal and professional life according to my own standard/ethic		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	14. Defining and solving problems		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	15. Developing skills that employers need		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	16. Accessing and using a variety of information sources		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	17. Getting along with people from various cultures, races, backgrounds, etc.		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	18. Recognizing and using effective oral communication skills		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	19. Developing and using effective leadership skills		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	20. Learning about existing and emerging career options		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	21. Understanding the interaction of human beings and the environment		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	22. Analyzing and drawing conclusions from various types of data		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	23. Recognizing and using effective written communication skills		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	24. Suggesting solutions to employers' needs		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	25. Working cooperatively in groups; working as a team member		④	③	②	①
④	③	②	①	26. Understanding international issues (political, economic, etc.)		④	③	②	①

INDICATE HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS.

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
①	②	③	④	⑤	27. Generally, BSU's environment was warm and friendly.
①	②	③	④	⑤	28. I had to delay my graduation because courses I needed were not available.
①	②	③	④	⑤	29. Overall, I think BSU is a fine university.
①	②	③	④	⑤	30. BSU needs a wider variety of activities and organizations for students.
①	②	③	④	⑤	31. I am convinced I made the right decision in choosing BSU.

FOR EACH SERVICE (OR PROGRAM) LISTED, INDICATE (a) WHETHER YOU USED THE SERVICE WHILE AT BSU AND (b), IF YOU USED THE SERVICE, YOUR LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH THAT SERVICE.

① I Did Not Use This Service	② I used this service and was: Very Satisfied	③ Satisfied	④ Neutral	⑤ Dissatisfied	⑥ Very Dissatisfied	
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	32. Course registration processes
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	33. Financial aid services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	34. Academic advising services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	35. Credit-by-Examination Program
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	36. Parking facilities and services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	37. Student employment services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	38. Residence halls and apartments
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	39. Food services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	40. Student health services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	41. Day care services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	42. Veterans services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	43. Honors Program
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	44. Library facilities and services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	45. Counseling services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	46. University-sponsored tutorial services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	47. Cultural programs and activities
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	48. College-sponsored social activities
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	49. Recreational and intramural programs and services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	50. Campus newsletters/newspapers
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	51. Career planning and job placement services
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	52. Internship experience
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	53. Distance education programs
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	54. Continuing education programs
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	55. Admissions
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	56. Registrar's office

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IF YOU ARE WORKING FULL-TIME.

57. How long did it take you to obtain your first full-time job after graduating from BSU?

①	Obtained the job prior to leaving BSU
②	Less than one month
③	1 to 3 months
④	4 to 6 months
⑤	7 to 12 months
⑥	Over 12 months
⑦	I was already employed and have continued in that job

58. If you were already employed, have you received a promotion or additional responsibilities as a result of the training you received?

①	Yes
②	No
③	Not Applicable

59. Are you using skills and knowledge acquired at BSU in your job?

①	Yes, frequently
②	Yes, occasionally
③	Almost never
④	No

60. Are you working at a job where you are using the special certifications or endorsements you received at BSU?

①	Yes
②	No
③	Not applicable

61. What is your current job? _____

_____

62. What is your current annual salary?

①	Less than $15,000
②	$15,000 - $19,999
③	$20,000 - $24,999
④	$25,000 - $29,999
⑤	$30,000 - $34,999
⑥	$35,000 - $39,999
⑦	$40,000 - $44,999
⑧	$45,000 - $49,999
⑨	$50,000 or more

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT YOUR MAJOR PROGRAM OR DEPARTMENT WHILE YOU WERE AT BSU?

Agree Strongly ↓ ① | Agree With Reservations ↓ ② | Disagree With Reservations ↓ ③ | Disagree Strongly ↓ ④

①	②	③	④	63.	Faculty members were genuinely interested in the welfare of students.
①	②	③	④	64.	I would advise a friend with similar interests to enroll in the same major.
①	②	③	④	65.	Many department/program courses were not offered at the right times for me.
①	②	③	④	66.	A number of courses covered the same material and were redundant.
①	②	③	④	67.	Department members actively helped graduates of the program find appropriate employment.
①	②	③	④	68.	If starting over, I would enroll in the same major/program again.
①	②	③	④	69.	There was good communication between faculty and students regarding student needs/concerns.
①	②	③	④	70.	Many opportunities existed outside of class for interactions between students and faculty departments.
①	②	③	④	71.	The interactions and discussions with my peers in the department were a major source of motivation and support.
①	②	③	④	72.	Department members encouraged and helped students explore ways of continuing their education after graduating from BSU.
①	②	③	④	73.	Faculty were outstanding teachers.

74. Most recent BSU degree _____ 75. Year _____ 76. Major _____

77. What advice would you give to your department to improve the quality of education offered?

_____

_____

_____

78. What did you like most about your BSU experience? _____

_____

_____

79. What was the best course you took at BSU? _____

80. What course did you find least helpful? _____

81. What was the hardest thing you had to do in order to complete your education at BSU?

_____

_____